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Presbytery of New York.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

AGAINST

THE REV. CHARLES A. BRIGGS, D. D.

Argument of

JOHN F. McCOOK,

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JOHN C. RANKIN CO., PRINTERS,
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INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE bringing charges of heresy against a minister of the Presbyterian Church, it is necessary to determine, first of all, whether his doctrines diverge from those of the Standards within legitimate limits, and do not affect the system of doctrine in which belief is required; or whether the error of his doctrines is vital and essential.* While it is true that many ministers do not subscribe to the *ipsissima verba* of the Confession, readers of ordinary intelligence can have no difficulty in determining whether their divergence from the doctrine of the Standards is vital or not. A trial for heresy is not in its essence a trial of a man, but a trial of a doctrine or of doctrines. It becomes the trial of a man only when he, with full knowledge of the divergence of his views from the Standards of the Church, still remains in the ministry, and thus violates his ordination vows. The prosecution in the case now before the Presbytery has sought to make this distinction as plain as possible in the charges which have been presented. It has credited the accused with good faith, virtually admitting that he supposes the doctrines which he has uttered, to be in harmony with the Standards of the Church. It would have been possible to have included in the charges, one dealing with the violation of ordination vows. For it is, at least doubtful whether Professor Briggs has sought the peace or the purity of the Church, either in the presentation of his doctrines or in the manner in which he has published and defended them. The Committee has, however, preferred to pass by, without judicial notice, his repeated attacks upon the traditional doctrines of the Church, upon its standards of doctrine, upon its dogmatic theology, as well as the needlessly arrogant and offensive tone of many of his utterances. It has preferred to confine the attention of the Presbytery to the simple issue, whether the doctrines of the

* Book of Discipline, Sec. 41.

Inaugural Address can be held to be in harmony with the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the fact that a minister cannot be tried for consequences which may be deduced from his doctrines. If the doctrines *per se* are not heretical, the fact that heretical conclusions can be drawn from them does not make the doctrines themselves heretical. If heretical conclusions can be logically drawn from the teaching of a church, it is the church which is responsible and not the minister who utters these doctrines. So that, however dangerous the results of a certain teaching may be supposed to be, it is the teaching itself and not its dangers which must be judged.

Although this is true, it cannot be denied that where an heretical doctrine is uttered, its importance is to be estimated not only by the fact that it is a divergence from the standards, but also by the results which follow the teaching of heresy. If, for example, a minister should teach the doctrine of Materialism, the Presbytery has a perfect right to consider, not merely the explicit divergence from the standards of such a philosophical theory, but also the ethical and theological results which follow from materialistic principles. In the case before us, the accused can claim with perfect justice that the charges should be confined to his explicit utterances, and should not relate to consequences deducible from those utterances.* But, on the other hand, the prosecution can claim, with equal justice, that having proved the charges from the explicit utterances of Professor Briggs, it has a perfect right to show the errors to be vital and essential, by indicating their tendencies and the results to which they lead, by discovering and setting forth the principle which the utterances reveal. For in no other way than this can the vital and essential character of the divergence be exhibited. It is my purpose, therefore, first to consider the charges and specifications *seriatim*, and afterwards

* Craighead Case, General Assembly's Minutes, 1824, pp. 122-124; Moore's Digest, p. 224.

to demonstrate, with as much clearness and fairness as possible, the false principle which underlies the teaching of Professor Briggs, and the results which are involved in case it be true that these charges are well founded.

Before dealing with the charges in their order, it may be well for me to notice one or two preliminary questions which suggest themselves.

I. It may be objected that the charges, if presented at all, should have been founded not simply on the Inaugural Address, but on all the numerous publications of the author, in which his views on many subjects, have been set forth more fully than in the address. I wish to call your attention at this point, very particularly to a question which has been raised by those portions of documentary evidence which have been read in your hearing by Prof. Briggs. And I refer especially to the many extracts from his own writings which do not contain the errors with which he is charged in the indictment. Many of them were written and published before the Inaugural Address was delivered. And it will be seen by reference to the specifications that most of the passages read in evidence by Prof. Briggs are not passages in his writings upon which the charges of error are based. They prove, at the most, that he has often taught doctrines which contain no error. But they do not prove that he has retracted any or all of the doctrines set forth in the Inaugural Address. I do not say that he can be charged with errors in all the different writings which he has published. The Committee of Prosecution has charged him with errors which have been chiefly set forth in the Inaugural Address. The accused is not on trial for any of the orthodox utterances which are doubtless to be found in his works. He is on trial for certain erroneous teaching, contained in the Inaugural Address, and works referred to therein. If the orthodox passages which have been read in your hearing were the only writings of Prof. Briggs, he would not have been charged with the offences found

Preliminary
Suggestions.

in the charges and specifications. He is not on trial for any orthodox utterances. He is on trial for certain explicit, definite statements in the Inaugural Address, which have never been retracted. It is not enough for him to prove that he has in many places taught orthodox doctrine, and he is called upon to defend, not the orthodox utterances of his various writings, but the alleged erroneous utterances of certain writings, which he has declined to retract.

1. It is possible for a man to write ten books, nine of which contain no heretical utterance, but the tenth of which is heretical. The orthodox utterances of the former works do not retract the heretical utterances of the last publication. A retraction of heretical doctrines can be made only after the heretical utterances have been made. If (and I state it only as a supposition) the former publications of Professor Briggs had been perfectly orthodox, we should be disposed to say that in the Inaugural he wrote inconsistently. And in effect that is what was said after his inaugural address. He was accused by critics of making contradictory statements. In this case, it was perfectly possible for him to come to the Presbytery and to say: "The Inaugural Address does not express my real views on the subject of Biblical Theology, I prefer to stand by the statements of my earlier works to the exclusion of the inaugural. My earlier publications were orthodox, my inaugural address does not represent my position." (I am still only assuming that the earlier publications contain nothing heretical or erroneous.)

But what has Professor Briggs done? He has republished his Inaugural Address in a second edition, *without retraction* or amendment, in the face of a fire of hostile criticism. The third edition of the Inaugural, copies of which have been presented to the members of this court, was published subsequent to his response to the original charges and specifications, and shows that response to have been in no sense a retraction. For in the preface to this third edition, Professor Briggs writes:

"I have seen nothing in the hostile criticism to lead me to make any changes whatever, either in the matter

or the form of the address * * * *. This third edition contains the charges made against me before the Presbytery of New York, October 5th, and my answer thereto."

If that means anything, it means that he has departed from the alleged orthodoxy of his earlier position, and is ready to stand by the doctrines of the address, without retraction. Of two contradictory propositions, one must be false. If, therefore, it be held that his Inaugural Address does not agree with the doctrines of his earlier publications, and if the former publications are orthodox, then the Inaugural Address contradicts what is orthodox.

2. The importance of the Inaugural Address as an expression of Professor Briggs's opinions has been alluded to. The objection was made by some one, when these proceedings were first instituted, that there was a certain unfairness in trying a man for heresy on a document, particularly on an address, especially on a document so short as the Inaugural Address. Now, it is perfectly plain that the length or the special treatment of a theological utterance is not necessarily related to heresy. A man might be convicted of heresy on the deliberate utterance of the single word "No," in response to a question as to his belief in certain essential doctrines. It is, of course, conceivable that a minister in a single sermon, or in an isolated article, might, either through carelessness or through an unfortunate literary style, say many things which might not be in harmony with the standards. It would be unfair to make detached utterances of this kind the basis of a judicial investigation. But the inaugural address is not an utterance of this kind. It is the deliverance of a professor about to assume the duties of a new department. It would be easy to show its perfect harmony with many passages in other works by Professor Briggs. But what makes it significant, in addition to the circumstances under which it was delivered, is that it deals with themes of such primary importance. It is not a mere outline of his plan

of lectures. It is a deliberate and aggressive utterance with respect to fundamental principles of our Faith. It deals with the doctrine of divine authority, with the doctrine of God, with the doctrine of Scripture, with the doctrine of Redemption, with the doctrine of man and of sin, with the doctrine of prophecy, and lastly with the doctrine of the future state. That the utterances of the Inaugural can be supported by quotations from Professor Briggs's other writings is claimed by himself.* But others may perhaps be pardoned if they decline to infer that the statements of the Inaugural are to be accepted because they may be found in "Whither" or in "Biblical Study." If the utterances contained in the Inaugural are in harmony with Professor Briggs's other works, then no injustice can be done by founding the charges on the utterances of the Inaugural. If, on the other hand, there is a divergence of the views set forth in the Inaugural and those of the earlier publications, then the later utterance, published and republished, may be assumed to be the more faithful expression of the author's views.

II. It is quite irrelevant to object that Professor Briggs has set forth nothing in his Inaugural Address which has not been before the Church for months and even years. It has been asked why he was not tried for the publication of any of his earlier works. Assuming that the utterances of the Inaugural are in harmony with his earlier publications, the answer is, that teaching of the kind contained in the Inaugural Address and contained in Professor Briggs's earlier publications, has already, in former years, attracted the attention of the Church, as may be learned by reference to the deliverances of the General Assemblies of 1882, 1883 and 1888,† on the subject of theological teaching in the Presbyterian seminaries. The only complaint which may be made is from the side of Professor Briggs's opponents, who may justly claim

* See Inaugural Address, *passim*.

† General Assembly Minutes, 1882, p. 92.

“ “ “ 1883, p. 631, 632.

“ “ “ 1888, p. 89, 90.

that such teaching has been treated with too great toleration and moderation in the times that are past.

III. It is further to be noticed that the language of the address itself furnishes *prima facie* a ground for supposing that the author is adverse to the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. This church stands committed by its constitution, not only to the supreme authority of Holy Scripture, but also to an interpretation of Holy Scripture. This interpretation is found in the Standards. In view of this, many of Prof. Briggs's declarations are significant.

"The Reformers," he says, "brought the Bible from its obscurity for a season, but their successors, the scholastics and ecclesiastics of Protestantism, pursued the old error and enveloped the Bible with creeds and ecclesiastical decisions, and dogmatic systems, and substituted for the authority of God *the authority of a Protestant rule of faith.*"*

Again he says: "We have undermined the breastworks of traditionalism; let us blow them to atoms. We have forced our way through the obstructions; let us remove them from the face of the earth."†

"Here in the citadel of the Bible two hosts confront the most sacred things of our religion—the one, the defenders of traditionalism, trembling for the ark of God; the other, the critics (of whom Prof. Briggs is one), a victorious army, determined to capture all its sacred treasures and to enjoy all its heavenly glories."‡

"*Another fault of Protestant theology* is in its limitation of the process of redemption to this world."§

"Vastly better to be born to die, than to be born to live in this uncertain world. What parent would not prefer to lay all his children in an early grave, assured of their salvation, rather than expose them to the dreadful risks of life and the possibility of eternal damnation?"

* Inaugural Address, p. 29.

† Id., p. 41.

‡ Id., p. 41.

§ Id., page 53.

¹ The italics are mine.—J. J. McC.

According to the current beliefs, those Chinese mothers who put their children to death make more Christians than all the missionaries.”*

“It is my opinion that if the grace of God should so impel a man that he could be transformed into the image of the holy Jesus, and, like Jesus, rebuke sin in high places, and trouble the people with his unapproachable holiness, he would earn the reward of Jesus even in this generation—at the hands of Christian theologians and ecclesiastics. The cry would resound through the streets of New York, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’” †

“The Reason also has its rights, its place and importance in the economy of Redemption. *I rejoice at the age of Rationalism*, with all its wonderful achievements in philosophy.” ‡

The objection of Prof. Briggs is not merely to certain phases of theology within his own communion, but to the essential, distinctive doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. His language is not that of a man pleading for the furtherance and promotion of his church and its creed, but that of an iconoclast. He addresses a Presbyterian audience in this way, and no one need be surprised at his final appeal:

“Criticism is at work with fire and knife. Let us cut down everything that is dead and harmful, every kind of dead orthodoxy, every species of effete ecclesiasticism, all merely formal morality, all those dry and brittle fences that constitute denominationalism, and are the barriers of Church Unity.” §

I admit that such language as I have quoted is ambiguous, so long as it stands apart from the context. We may not learn from these passages of the address what hurtful doctrines these are, against which the Professor earnestly declaims. But when we turn to the charges before us, and notice the proof given to

* Inaugural Address, 2d Edition, p. 105.

† Id., page 59.

‡ Inaugural Address, p. 65.

§ “ “ p. 67.

¹ The italics are mine.—J. J. McC.

support them, we shall find the desired information. It will be shown that the reforms suggested in the Inaugural Address itself, are inconsistent with the Standards to which Prof. Briggs has subscribed. The breastworks of traditionalism, the citadel of the Bible, the so-called dead orthodoxy, that to which fire and knife are to be applied—all these are simply certain doctrines of the Holy Scripture, as interpreted in the Standards of the Presbyterian Church.

To adopt for a moment the expressive imagery of the Professor, it is the solemn duty of this court to determine whether our citadel shall be surrendered to those who have declared their opposition to the faith which we are pledged to defend.

Charges I. and II. refer to the doctrine of Prof. Briggs, that there are three great fountains of divine authority—The Bible, the Church and the Reason.* This is in opposition to the teaching of our Standards which declare the Holy Scriptures to be the only rule of faith and life, of faith and obedience, or, as it is expressed in the ordination vow, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. The Confession of Faith teaches, and the ordination vow taken by every minister of our Church assumes, the infallibility of the Scriptures.† It is impossible to separate a divine authority from the infallible rule.

Charges I.
and II.

Professor Briggs himself says in his Inaugural Address: “Divine authority is the only authority to which man can yield implicit obedience, on which he can rest in loving certainty and build with joyous confidence.”‡

The only distinction that can be made between an infallible rule and a divine authority is that the former expression is stronger than the latter. But it may be safely affirmed, in so far as religious matters are con-

* Inaugural Address, p. 24.

† Confession of Faith, Chap. I., Secs. i., ii., viii., x. Larger Catechism, 2, 3. Shorter Catechism, 2. Ordination Vow, Form of Government, Chap. xv., Art. xii.

‡ Inaugural Address, p. 24.

cerned, that wherever the authority is divine, the rule is infallible, and that wherever the rule is infallible the authority is divine. If a fallible rule exists, it cannot be a rule which is supported by divine authority. And if the Bible is the only infallible rule, it must be the only infallible, that is to say divine, authority. These are the first principles of revealed religion.

As Professor Briggs does not deny that the Bible is a source of divine authority, but does affirm that the Reason and the Church are also sources of divine authority, it is only necessary at this point that it should be considered whether it is, indeed, true that divine authority is to be found in the Reason and in the Church. It is really no part of our duty to show and to prove that the Bible is the only source of divine authority; for to deny that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice is contrary to Presbyterian doctrine. To assume that it is necessary to prove that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice is to assume that we are no longer Presbyterians, for our Church asserts that it is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Professor Briggs's position in this respect places him *ipso facto* in a non-Presbyterian position, for unless the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the only fountain of divine authority, one may set up doctrines on a rational or ecclesiastical foundation and call them Presbyterian. The mere fact that the doctrine of a three-fold source of authority is held by Professor Briggs, the mere fact that an apology for the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church is called for at this point, establishes the truth of the first two charges. But, in order that the issue may be perfectly clear, we may dwell for a few moments upon this specification.

It is no part of the function of this Committee, nor is it necessary for Professor Briggs, to explain and treat thoroughly that important philosophical and apologetical question as to the relation of Reason and Revelation, nor to set forth how far the Church's authority is founded on divine truth. The Confession of

Faith gives no option. Whatever the Reason may accomplish, whatever the Church may teach, if we are Presbyterians we have no right to claim that the Reason and the Church are sources of divine authority. That is a matter which is settled by all men when they become Presbyters of our Church.

Charge I. is as follows:

Authority of
the Reason.

“The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America charges the Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., being a Minister of the said Church and a member of the Presbytery of New York, with teaching that the Reason is a fountain of divine authority which may and does savingly enlighten men, even such men as reject the Scriptures as the authoritative proclamation of the will of God and reject also the way of salvation through the mediation and sacrifice of the Son of God as revealed therein; which is contrary to the essential doctrine of the Holy Scripture and of the Standards of the said Church, that the Holy Scripture is most necessary, and the rule of faith and practice.”

It may be freely admitted that there is great latitude under the Confession as to the place of Reason as an authority in matters of religion. Before condemning Professor Briggs's doctrine, it is necessary to consider the perfect legitimacy and orthodoxy of certain positions taken by him. For example, there will be no dispute with him on the part of many Christians that the Holy Ghost influences the mind directly, although there are those who hold that the Holy Ghost acts always through the Word, employing means to the great end, the salvation and sanctification of the soul. Nor will it be disputed by those who believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures, that God moved directly the mind of those who committed the Word to writing. It is also true that the conscience may be the vehicle of divine truth. But if this be the same with holding that the Reason is a source of divine authority, then it is quite legitimate to conclude that the Reason is the only

divine authority. For the Word is apprehended by the Reason, just as the direct teaching of the Spirit is apprehended by the Reason, and our source of divine authority is thus confined on Professor Briggs's own principles to the Reason alone. But the human conscience is perverted, and cannot therefore be called a divine authority. If, by the assertion that the Reason is a source of divine authority, Professor Briggs means to say that God speaks directly to the Reason, then there is nothing heretical in the doctrine. In the appendix to his Inaugural* he has set forth with perfect clearness a doctrine of the Reason which is in conformity with the doctrine of the Standards. But he has gone much farther than that. It is absolutely impossible to interpret his words in any but the one way, and that is, that the Church, the Bible and the Reason are co-ordinate as authorities. Unless they are co-ordinate, they cannot be divine. If there should be anything in the data of one of these authorities contradictory to the data of any other of the three, there would be a conflict of divine authority, which is impossible. When the question is raised, Should a certain statement of the Bible or of the Church be accepted? we should have to reject such portions of the teaching of the Bible and of the Church as seem to us either above or contradictory to Reason, or else we must hold that the Church and the Reason are not sources of divine authority. If we reject any portion of the teaching of the Bible because it seems repugnant to Reason, we impeach the truthfulness of God, and the authorities are not co-ordinate, but the Reason is supreme.

In addition to this, unless the three authorities are co-ordinate, then the Reason or the Church is the supreme authority, for, as Professor Briggs claims, the Bible is not inerrant, and its errors must therefore be corrected either by the Reason or the Church.

Unless the three authorities are co-ordinate, they cannot be held to be divine authorities, unless they are the authority of three divinities which are not co-ordinate.

* Inaugural Address, second edition, appendix, p. 89.

In the Christian system, the divine authority can no more be subordinate to another than one divinity can be subordinate to another.

If we come back once more to the claim that Professor Briggs means by Reason the conscience and the religious feeling, it must be answered that the conscience cannot be said to be a divine authority except in a perfect man, for the conscience has been perverted by the Fall. The religious feeling, on the other hand, is not a source of divine authority, but only a feeling about some truth of religion, so that truth must first be revealed or discovered in order that the religious feeling may be awakened about that which is truly divine.

If it should be held that the religious feeling gives us direct knowledge or consciousness of divine truth, it must be answered that this view is contrary to the declaration of the Standards that the Word of God is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

If it should be admitted that the Reason, although a Martineau. divine authority, is not inerrant, it must be answered that in such case it cannot be divine. Professor Briggs has, however, not left us in doubt as to his meaning, because he has illustrated it, in the first place by the example of Martineau,* and in the second place by his reference to the heathen in the appendix to his Inaugural Address, second edition.†

1. I shall first notice the illustration of this principle of the authority of the Reason, as it is presented by Professor Briggs in the case of Martineau. And let it be distinctly understood that we are not in this trial to pass judgment on Martineau personally. We are not to engage in the personal and uncharitable discussion of the character and eternal hopes of that eminent writer, but are to ask whether his published doctrines indicate that the Reason alone will give one a saving knowledge of God. Let us assume,

a. That the Reason does give us a knowledge of God. If this be true, and it is undoubtedly true, does that

* Inaugural Address, p. 27.

† *Ib.*, second edition, p. 88.

make the Reason a source or fountain of divine authority? If God leaves traces of His power, of His intelligence, of His love, of His justice and holiness on the face of Nature or in my fallen mind, can my mind and can Nature be said to be sources of divine authority? Evidently not. The distinction between human authority and the divine authority becomes meaningless if the Reason is a source of divine authority.

b. Let us assume also that we reach a knowledge of God independent of the Bible through the Reason, and that in this limited sense Reason is a source of divine authority. Is that all that Professor Briggs has maintained? The illustration of Martineau shows us, that by finding God, more is meant than inferences about God drawn by the Reason. It means that God is the object of knowledge such as will save the soul. And it is this doctrine which forms the subject of the first charge.

Now, if we take the more religious parts of Martineau's writings, we shall find that they consist of a presentation of ethics which agrees for the most part with the doctrines of revealed religion,* of an able and eloquent presentation of the theistic argument,† and of lectures and sermons founded on texts of Holy Scripture.‡ So that, assuming that Martineau has attained to a saving knowledge of God in the confessional and scriptural sense, it cannot be claimed that this religious knowledge comes altogether and solely from the Reason. Can such a thing be affirmed of a man who has lived for more than three-score years in a Christian land, who has stood for that time on the very threshold of a Christian Church which puts the Holy Scriptures in the forefront of its doctrine? If Martineau held to every article of the creed, it would not justify Professor Briggs's statement. But, whatever the personal creed or character of Martineau may be, he is known to-day as a radical opponent of scriptural truth. If Professor Briggs had called him a representative philosopher, or a representative critic, or a representative rationalist of

* Types of Ethical Theory. Study of Religion.

† Seat of Authority in Religion. Bk. I., chap. 1, 2.

‡ Hours of Thought on Sacred Things.

our time, one might be disposed to put another interpretation on his proposition that there are three fountains of divine authority. But he describes him with Newman and Spurgeon as one of the representative Christians.* In what sense can Martineau be said to have found God through the Reason, so as to be called a representative Christian? He, like other beings of which the Holy Scriptures speak, believes that there is one God, and he does well. But he does not believe, or he states that he does not believe, in the Incarnation,† or in the divinity of Jesus Christ.‡ The divine authority of the Reason has led him to reject the doctrine of the Atonement,§ of almost all the most authoritative utterances of our holy religion.|| The divine authority of his reason has contradicted, and contradicted flatly, the infallibility of the Word of God,¶ and yet we are told, in the Inaugural Address, that the average opinion of the Christian world would not assign him (Spurgeon) a higher place in the kingdom of God than Martineau or Newman.**

2. If there were any doubt as to Professor Briggs's meaning, it would be dispelled by the second illustration which we have chosen from his discussion of this important subject. He declares that "Unless God's authority is discerned in the forms of the Reason, there is no ground upon which any of the heathen could ever have been saved, for they know nothing of Bible or Church."†† We shall, doubtless, hear either from Professor Briggs or from his supporters a great deal about "*a priori* reasoning." Here is an example of "*a priori* reasoning" in its worst form. The Confession, and the Holy Scriptures on which the Confession is founded, repeatedly teach and emphasize the fact that Jesus

* Inaugural Address, p. 28.

† Seat of Authority in Religion. Bk. IV., chap. 2; also p. 650.

‡ *Ib.*, Bk. IV., chap. 2.

§ *Ib.*, p. 486.

|| *Ib.*, p. 650.

¶ *Ib.*, Book II., chap. 2; also p. 650.

** Inaugural Address, p. 28.

†† Inaugural Address. Second edition, appendix, pp. 88, 89.

Christ is the only Saviour,* and that faith is the means by which salvation is secured.† Now, it is not heresy to express the hope that the heathen who have never heard of Jesus Christ may be saved, although the Christian Church by its missions seems to declare that it is carrying the gospel to a lost world. But it is heretical to contradict the express teaching of the Word of God, and found that contradiction on the salvation of the heathen world.‡ Why not carry the reasoning farther and say that because the heathen cannot be lost therefore they must all have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and if they worship idols, they do it on divine authority, because they cannot be lost. There are, doubtless, many arguments in the works of anti-Christian thinkers to prove that a man does not have to believe in Christ to be saved. It is no concern of the Presbytery or of the Presbyterian Church to call such men to account before the courts of the Church. But we do say that when one of our clergy contradicts in this plain manner the very doctrine which is of the essence of Presbyterianism—or, rather, which is of the essence of Christianity—then we have to choose between our doctrines and those of the man who flatly contradicts them.

It is evident that if the Reason is a divine authority, then whatever the Reason affirms to be true is true. But the Reason in different men affirms different things to be true. The standard by which the truths of the Reason with regard to Religion are to be judged is, according to Presbyterian doctrine, not the Reason or the Church, but the Word of God.

If it should be claimed that the three fountains of divine authority referred to are complementary authorities, so that the Bible reveals one kind of religious truth, the Church another, and the Reason another, the conclusion reached is contradictory to the statement that the Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

* Confession of Faith, chap. VIII., with Proof Texts. Larger Catechism, 36. Shorter Catechism, 21.

† Confession of Faith, chap. XIV., with Proof Texts. Larger Catechism, 72, 153. Shorter Catechism, 86.

‡ Inaugural Address, 2d ed., p. 88.

We are not ready even for a moment, if we are believers in the Christianity of the Bible, to join in the sentiment of Professor Briggs in this respect. He asserts, "It may be that these modern thinkers have a divine calling to withdraw men from mere priestcraft, ceremonialism, dead orthodoxy and ecclesiasticism, and concentrate their attention on the essentials of the Christian religion."* What men? These men who "depreciate the Bible and the Church as merely external modes of finding God,"† for if we are Presbyterians, we believe that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. "We are warned lest we * * * * depreciate the Reason and the Christian consciousness,"‡ but are we not rather warned lest we depreciate the obligatory and infallible character of the objective revelation of God in His Word, lest we depreciate the atonement of Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth? This doctrine as to the divine authority of the human reason is only a symptom of a general principle which we shall have occasion to notice later on. But it is a symptom which is to be regarded as a fatal symptom, a symptom of departure not merely from the Presbyterian standards, but of departure from that position which maintains the exclusive and obligatory claims of the Christian religion.

Charge II is as follows :

Authority of
the Church.

"The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America charges the Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., being a Minister of the said Church and a member of the Presbytery of New York, with teaching that the Church is a fountain of divine authority which, apart from the Holy Scripture, may and does savingly enlighten men ; which is contrary to the essential doctrine of the Holy Scripture and of the Standards of the said Church, that the Holy Scripture is most necessary and the rule of faith and practice."

* Inaugural Address, p. 27.

† Inaugural Address, p. 26.

‡ Inaugural Address, p. 27.

With regard to the statement that the Church is a source of divine authority, it is difficult to gain a clear idea, but what was said with regard to the Reason is in some particulars applicable to the Church. We are told that the Church is both a source* and a seat of divine † authority. Now, it is not contrary to either Scripture or the Confession to regard the Church as being subject to divine influence. But it is contrary both to Scripture and to the Standards of our Church to speak of it as a source of divine authority. The illustration given by Professor Briggs is sufficient to show the error of his doctrine. It is said that Newman could not find God through the Bible. Now, if we assume that in so far as the teaching of the Church of Rome is true, it is the teaching of the Word of God, there is nothing contra-confessional in the statement that many pious souls have found God through the Church. Prof. Briggs asks: "But what shall we say of a modern like Newman, who could not reach certainty, striving never so hard, through the Bible or the Reason, but who did find authority in the institutions of the Church?"

An answer is to be found in Newman's own writings. I quote from his *Apologia*:

"I was brought up from a child to take great delight in reading the Bible; but I had formed no religious convictions till I was fifteen. Of course I had a perfect knowledge of my catechism." ‡

Again he says:

"When I was fifteen (in the autumn of 1816) a great change of thought took place in me. I fell under the influences of a definite creed, and received into my intellect impressions of dogma, which, through God's mercy, have never been effaced or obscured. Above and beyond the conversations and sermons of the excellent man, long dead, the Rev. Walter Mayers, of Pembroke College, Oxford, who was the human means of this beginning of divine faith in me, was the effect of

* Inaugural Address, p. 24.

† Inaugural Address, p. 26.

‡ *Apologia pro vitâ sua*, p. 1.

the books which he put into my hands, all of the school of Calvin."*

In view of these statements, no Presbyterian can affirm that it was through the Church that Newman found divine authority. If so, then so far from the Bible being the only rule of faith, it is an insufficient and inefficient rule of faith. If so, then what Newman found in the Church, he had not found in the Bible; and what he found in the Church being apart from the Bible, or in addition to the Bible, one must conclude that the Holy Scriptures were not the only rule of faith and practice, which Prof. Briggs has maintained by this illustration; and by his conclusion he has contradicted the Standards of the Presbyterian Church. Let me especially direct your attention to what this Word of God is held to be in the doctrine of the Westminster Standards. In presenting in evidence the answer to the second question in the Shorter Catechism, Prof. Briggs seemed to me to lay especial emphasis upon the word "*contained*," as if the terms Word of God and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were not co-extensive terms. Is it true that the Word of God is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, or that the Word of God is the Old and New Testament Scriptures? According to the Catechism, the Word of God is contained in the Scriptures; and in the light of the Confession of Faith, it may be seen what is meant by this. It is not the greater containing the lesser. The Confession of Faith (chap. i., sec. ii.) says: "Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testament, which are these": then follows the list of books. If the Word of God is contained in these Scriptures, and these Scriptures are contained in the Word of God, how are we to explain the difference of statement except upon the ground that the terms are co-extensive?

Of course, it is not to be supposed that when a Church teaches what is contrary to Scripture, it is

* *Apologia pro vitâ sua*, p. 4.

teaching what rests on divine authority. Institutional Christianity, in so far as it is founded on divine authority, is founded on the Word of God. It may be held that there is an *Ecclesia Docens*, but the Church can only teach what it has already learned. The moment we admit that the Church can teach what it has not learned from the Word of God, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, we abandon the doctrine of the rule of faith and practice contained in the Confession.

It is true that in the appendix to the second edition to the Inaugural Address, Professor Briggs explains the doctrine upon which I have been commenting, by showing that, according to the Confession, the Church has divine authority, in such a sense that God is present in His Church, rendering the sacraments efficacious, and endowing His ministers with authority.* But this is not to say that the Church is a source of divine authority, but only that it is subject to divine influence. The declaration of the Inaugural Address was that the Church is a source of divine authority, in such a sense that Newman, who could not find God through the Bible, was able to find Him through the Church.” †

There are not three sources of divine authority. There is only one. It is not the doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, it is a contradiction of Presbyterian doctrine, not to say of Christian doctrine, to assert, as Professor Briggs asserts, that it is a matter of temperament or environment which way of access to God men may pursue. It is the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as well as the doctrine of the Confession, that there is but one way of access to God; that the way to God is not dependent on the subjective conditions of the believer, but on an objective, obligatory, exclusive authority, and that this authority is not three-fold, but one.

Charge III. is as follows:

“The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America charges the Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D.,

* Inaugural Address, second edition, appendix, p. 87.

† Inaugural Address, p. 25.

being a Minister of the said Church and a member of the Presbytery of New York, with teaching that errors may have existed in the original text of the Holy Scripture, as it came from its authors, which is contrary to the essential doctrine taught in the Holy Scripture and in the Standards of the said Church, that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God written, immediately inspired, and the rule of faith and practice.”

But Professor Briggs has not only denied the exclusiveness of the Holy Scriptures as a divine authority, he has denied their infallibility.* By this is not meant that he pronounces all the history, all the doctrine, and all the devotional parts of the Scripture to be untrue or founded on untruth. On the contrary, while he is unwilling to accept the Bible as altogether accurate in its history, he is ready to admit its infallibility as a rule of faith and practice, as that which should guide our religious thinking, our devotions and our lives.

If this be admitted, and we presume that this is what Professor Briggs means, it then becomes a fair question, What shall be said of discrepancies and errors which, as he says, “Historical Criticism” finds in the Holy Scriptures? †

On looking at the doctrine of a three-fold divine authority, one has no difficulty in seeing that Professor Briggs’s inferences as to the truthfulness of Scripture are largely dependent upon the principle that the Reason is co-ordinate with the Bible, if not superior to it, as an authority in religion. And here I would set forth two propositions as disclaimers, in order that the construction of the Professor’s words may be as liberal as possible.

1. In the first place, it is not claimed that any particular Inspiration. theory of the mode of inspiration is taught in the Scriptures, or in the Confession of Faith. The Scripture, in various places, does teach that the Scripture is inspired—that is, it claims inspiration for itself ‡—

* Inaugural Address, pp. 34, 35.

† Inaugural Address, p. 34.

‡ 2 Tim. 3, 16.

and the Confession declares it to be the Word of God, and to be immediately inspired by God.* As to the precise nature of that inspiration, it is silent. It is said that holy men of old “spake as they were moved,” but there is nothing heretical in denying the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. Is there, then, any place where the line can be drawn between a theory which denies the inspiration of Scripture and one which minimizes inspiration but yet admits the fact of inspiration? I believe that there is; and making the most liberal allowance for the diversity of views among theologians as to the mode of inspiration, I believe that it can be shown that when such a line as I have indicated is drawn, it will be found that the theory maintained by Professor Briggs is irreconcilably opposed to the doctrine of inspiration, as it is set forth in the Word of God and in the Standards of the Presbyterian Church.

It is possible to employ words which have a recognized meaning, and at the same time so to pervert that meaning as virtually to rob them of their real significance. An Arian or a Sabellian, for example, may talk about the Triune God without recognizing the tri-personality of the Godhead, or the Unity of the three Persons. A Socinian may talk about the divinity of our Lord while denying His eternity and equality with the Father. A man may teach that missionaries should be sent to the heathen in order that the heathen may be saved, and yet deny that the heathen without missionaries will be lost. In the same way, it is possible for a man to speak of the inspiration of the Scriptures, and yet to rob inspiration of its meaning. Now, whatever Professor Briggs’s theory of inspiration may or may not be, it is not sufficient to show that it is lamentably defective, or logically absurd, or possibly dangerous in its applications. It may have all these characteristics and yet be perfectly admissible within the liberty of the Standards. We do not try men for being bad logicians. It might be shown

* Confession of Faith, Chap. I., Sec. 2, and Proof Texts cited.

that Professor Briggs's theory of inspiration is indefensible from either a philosophical or a religious point of view. And it will be shown from Professor Briggs's own words that it involves consequences of the most serious kind. We are told that the inspiration is not in the language, nor in the style, nor in the sentences or clauses, but that it is in the concept.* It may be claimed, that such a statement, however unintelligible it may be, is capable of a two-fold interpretation, and is not necessarily heretical.†

But suppose it can be shown, not that it is capable of an heretical explanation, but that Professor Briggs uses it to support an heretical assertion, then I assume that it must be taken into consideration in judging of the orthodoxy of his utterances. That is to say, a man may lay down premises from which an heretical conclusion can be drawn—in another place the heretical conclusion may be stated. The premises may not of themselves be heretical, but are capable of an heretical interpretation. The author cannot be judged by such premises alone, but if it can be shown that he himself has been led into heresy from the premises which he has already laid down, then I claim that the premises may be judged as well as the conclusion.

If, then, it can be shown that Professor Briggs's doctrine of inspiration admits of heretical deductions being drawn from it, and if it can be shown that he himself makes such deductions from it, I claim that the grounds of the deduction, as well as the deduction, demand the judicial consideration of the Presbytery. If it is heresy to contradict the truthfulness of Scripture, and if a certain doctrine is contradictory in its implication of the truthfulness of Scripture, and if Professor Briggs asserts that the Scriptures are untruthful in any respect, then it is fair to assume that his theory of the untruthfulness

* Inaugural Address, p. 31.

† Craighead Case, General Assembly Minutes, 1824, p. 122; Moore's Digest, p. 224.

of Scripture is connected with his theory of inspiration.

What is the natural inference from the proposition that the inspiration of the Bible is the inspiration of the concept, not of the words; that there is nothing divine in the sentences? The only way in which a truth can be stated is in a proposition expressed or implied. And all propositions are sentences. A concept may suggest a truth, but it cannot express it. The consequence is that if it is only the concept which is inspired, the truth is not inspired.

In addition to this, if the concept alone is inspired, then the authors of Scripture had inspiration, but there is none left for us, unless indeed the inspired concept was expressed in language. If it was, then there is something divine in the words and the sentences. But suppose it to be said, and it doubtless will be said, Professor Briggs is not a logician and he may not have meant to say what you attribute to him. Very well. What did he mean? If the concept of a narrative, using Professor Briggs's philosophical phraseology, is inspired and the writer commits that concept to language, then the narrative is true, or else it is not inspired. When the writer commits a concept of doctrine to language the doctrine is divine or it is not inspired. If that were Professor Briggs's view of inspiration, some of us might find fault with it, but that would be our affair, not the affair of any church judicatory. That is why I say that his doctrine of the inspired concept, although it may be unintelligible, may possibly not be called heretical. But if the words of Scripture are not inerrant, then the concept of the words of Scripture, cannot be said to be inspired. An inspiration that misleads is worse than no inspiration at all, for then without a misleading inspiration, a man might either remain silent or make a successful guess at the truth. I will not insist upon it as an essential part of this charge, but I do suggest it, that Professor Briggs's doctrine of inspiration is clearly a part of his doctrine as to the truthfulness of the Holy Scriptures.

2. In considering the doctrine of Inerrancy, which is denied by Professor Briggs and which he regards as one of the barriers which keep men from the Holy Scriptures, it is necessary to repudiate the proposition that one proved error destroys the authority of the Scriptures. Certainly it destroys the entire infallibility of the Bible. If a man break a mirror at one corner, the mirror is broken. He may be able to see his face in another part, but the mirror is no longer unbroken. The columns of the Parthenon may be white, but if there is a speck on them they cannot be said to be without spot. And so if there be a proved error in the Scriptures, the Scriptures, not being inerrant, are not infallible, although they do not lose their authority, any more than the entire mirror becomes opaque because it happens to be cracked in the corner, or the pillar of the Parthenon becomes black by the spot being on it. When I say that a document is infallible, I mean that it is without error, so that if I claim that I have found an error, unless I can give up the error, I must in so far give up the infallibility of the document. That is very different from saying that the whole of the document is untrue. Inasmuch as it has been shown that Prof. Briggs has not retracted or disavowed any of the teaching contained in the Inaugural Address, I shall now read a passage which cannot be construed as being consistent with the essential doctrine of the infallibility of Holy Scripture. It is in contradiction to the doctrine of the infallibility of that part of Holy Scripture which is known as predictive prophecy. Prof. Briggs has said: "Kuenen has shown that if we insist upon the fulfillment of the details of the predictive prophecy of the Old Testament, many of the predictions have been reversed by history; and the great body of the Messianic prediction has not only never been fulfilled, but cannot now be fulfilled, for the reason that its own time has passed forever."*

* Inaugural Address, p. 38.

It is to the statement of Prof. Briggs, not to the citation of Kuenen, to which I now call attention, especially as this is illustrated in detail by reference to the prophet Jonah. It will be seen that the passage just quoted is quite inconsistent with belief in the truthfulness of Scripture. An infallible rule of faith and practice cannot readily be conceived of as containing false prophecy. It is the doctrine of the Scriptures that all Messianic prophecy will be fulfilled. I am aware that the interpretation of the fulfillment of prophecy is very difficult, and there is a danger of being too ready to find minute predictions fulfilled in events which can only be extravagantly assumed to be included in the inspired mind of the prophet. If Professor Briggs had simply said, "There are many predictions made by the prophets which we cannot understand, which refer to events of which we are ignorant," I take it, that he would be in harmony with the Scriptures, and would be supported by Christian scholars. But there are two points especially in Professor Briggs's theory which are in direct conflict with the assertions of all Scripture, and in particular are in direct contradiction to the words of Christ.

Here once more we are forced into the apparently illogical position of using Scripture as an argument against one who denies the inerrancy of Scripture. But as it is the principle of our Church, that the Holy Scriptures are infallible, the argument must appeal to all those who have not lost their confidence in the Word of God.

Let me first call your attention to what Professor Briggs says with respect to Messianic prophecy. His position is not that of the extreme rationalists who look upon prophecy as simply teaching after the event. He still holds to predictive prophecy, but he says, of Messianic prophecy, that a large part of it not only has not been fulfilled, but that from the nature of the case it can never be fulfilled.

Two suppositions are here open to us in interpreting the author's meaning.

1. We may suppose that the prophecies are inspired prophecies.

2. We may suppose that the prophecies are uninspired prophecies.

We have a right to conclude from Professor Briggs's reference to Jonah,* that his doctrine is that even an inspired prophecy may fail of fulfillment, because God may recall His decree. Now, this idea that a prophet may be inspired to make a false prophecy is repugnant to the scriptural idea of God, who is represented as a God who cannot lie; but, as Professor Briggs expresses it, it is possible that "God may recall His decree." A reference to Scripture is sufficient to show how utterly contradictory to the Bible such a doctrine of God's inspiration, of God's nature and Word is. But, in order to bring scriptural proof in support of the assertion, Professor Briggs refers to the case of Jonah.

I shall not be so presumptuous as to attempt to instruct the theologians of this Presbytery in regard to the meaning of the familiar narrative of the Book of Jonah, but shall content myself with quoting from a work of a friend of Professor Briggs in which the matter is discussed upon what I take to be sound exegetical principles. Dr. Morris writes: "To quote the minatory declaration of God against Nineveh, taken in connection with the subsequent repentance of the people and the consequent change in the divine dealing with them, as an instance of unfulfilled prediction, certainly involves a grave misapprehension of the nature and function of prophecy. To draw from this and similar instances in the Old Testament, where conditional judgments are threatened but afterwards withheld, the inference that many divine predictions have been reversed

* Inaugural Address, p. 38.

by history, is a still more serious mistake."* But is it not something more than a mistake, is it not to impeach the divine truthfulness?

Especially is this the case when we turn to the words of Jesus Christ with respect to the prophecies concerning Himself. We have not walked with Him on that road to Emmaus and so are constantly making mistakes, seeing fulfillment of prophecies at wrong times and under wrong circumstances, or failing to see fulfillment when the event is in history.

But whether it be scholastic or whether it be critical—to deny the fulfillment of the divine prediction is to deny that the prophecy is true, for it must be either true or false. To deny the fulfillment of prophecy is to deny that God is faithful to His promises or His declarations of judgment. It is to deny that God is a God of Truth. †

Well, then, suppose we admit that the inspiration extends to, and the inerrancy covers, only that part of the teaching which has to do with faith, and practice, with "the teaching that guides our devotions, our thinking, and our conduct." ‡ Suppose that, following Professor Briggs's suggestion, we distinguish one part of the Bible from another part. Suppose we say the narrative is a chronicle more or less errant, more or less fabulous, but we still have those great ideas which lie at the foundation of our holy religion: God has given us a Word which is to be our guide with respect to conduct and life only, but He has left men free to make erroneous statements about history, and we must put the Word into the crucible of the Reason, and admit only that to be true which is in conformity to the Reason. In that case it must be asked whether the Bible can be a rule of faith and practice, an infallible rule of faith and

* A Calm Review, etc., Prof. E. D. Morris, p. 32.

† Confession of Faith, Chap. 1., Sec. II., and Proof Texts cited. Larger Catechism, Q. 7, and Proof Texts cited. Shorter Catechism, Q. 4, and Proof Texts cited.

‡ Inaugural Address, p. 36.

practice, if its infallibility does not extend to its statements of fact as well as to its presentation of doctrine. Can the narrative be divorced from the doctrine so that we may say of the one that it is fallible, and of the other that it is infallible, that it is inerrant? I submit that the separation is impossible. Both narrative and faith are knit together. We have not followed cunningly devised fables, but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The ground of your objection to the historical narrative will be a rational principle, a principle of the human reason. Where then do you draw the line between what is in accordance with human reason and what is not? Is rational philosophy founded on principles so infallible that it will accept the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and reject the miracle of Jonah, upon which Jesus Christ set the seal of His authority, and which He used as an illustration of His triumph over death? Shall we accept St. Paul's doctrine of the second Adam, and regard the first Adam as a myth? Or will you, perhaps, go farther and say that the author who set forth a doctrine which is binding on your conscience will tell you an untruth when he relates events? It would not be expedient to tell a man in whom the processes of thought were weak that if he rejected the facts he must also reject the doctrines, but a man who was accustomed to reason would see that if he rejected the facts the doctrines were in peril. Now, it is possible for a man to take the position of rejecting the facts, but if the facts are inseparable from the doctrines, then we must say to such a man, you may be entitled to your doctrine, but your doctrine is not that of the Presbyterian Church.

In the face of the claim that there are errors in the Bible, which cannot be explained away,* and discrepancies which we cannot account for, assuming that the errors exist now, we find ourselves in the presence of an alternative, either all that the Bible says of its own veracity, all that Jesus Christ, the prophets, and the apostles say of the Bible's veracity, the fact that

* Inaugural Address, p. 35.

it is called the *Holy* Scripture—the Word of God—all these great reasons for believing in the truthfulness of the Bible must be set aside in deference to the results of historical criticism, or else there must be some way of explaining this discrepancy between the Bible as we have it now, and the Bible of which these sacred authorities speak.

One way to get rid of the difficulty is to accuse the advocates of inerrancy of arguing in a circle because they quote Scripture in support of Scripture. That is all very well, but can a Presbyterian do that without contradicting the doctrine that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice? Another way is to say that we have not yet light enough to decide in the face of these witnesses among the prophets and apostles, that the Word of God can teach error. Another way is to claim that as these inspired authorities could not err, the original manuscript was inerrant. Now, that may be laughed at as an *a priori* argument. It is singular that those who are so stringent in their efforts to exalt the human reason should so often decry Logic, and that those who tell us that Logic should be kept in its proper place should introduce an appeal to a logical principle in order to break the force of the statements of the Word of God. What is meant by an *a priori* argument? There are two ways in which that term is used. One use is as a synonym for that which is necessary and fundamental. In this sense, *a priori* truth is truth which cannot be thought to be untrue. The other meaning is, that *a priori* truth is that which is known in advance of direct experience.

In the latter sense, perhaps, this is an *a priori* argument. That is, it is asserted in advance of any human criticism that if Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, and His inspired apostles have affirmed the truthfulness of the Scriptures, the Scriptures are true. But of what use is such an argument to those who, like Professor Briggs, deny the inerrancy of the Scripture? How can it be known that what the Scriptures themselves say of themselves is true? If men will not take

a brief to assail the entire truthfulness of Scripture,* it is not necessary in a court of this Church to take a brief to convert them to Presbyterian doctrine; for the Word of God is the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

But it is this barrier of inerrancy, we are told, that keeps many away from the Bible.† That is to say, a fundamental article of the Presbyterian faith, the doctrine of authority, is what keeps so many men away from the Bible. This is a restless age, an age when men are demanding an authority upon which they may rest securely and confidently. It has been the boast of Christianity, and especially the boast of the Presbyterian Church, that it has stood in the midst of conflicting systems, and has held out this steady lamp, this certain light, to a troubled world, this unshaken faith in the Word of Almighty God.

Charges IV and V are as follows:

CHARGE IV.

“The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America charges the Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., being a Minister of the said Church and a member of the Presbytery of New York, with teaching that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, which is contrary to direct statements of Holy Scripture and to the essential doctrines of the Standards of the said Church that the Holy Scripture evidences itself to be the Word of God by the consent of all the parts, and that the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself.”

Authenticity
of the
Scriptures.

CHARGE V.

“The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America charges the Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., being a Minister of the said Church and a member of the Presbytery of New York, with teaching that Isaiah is not the author of half of the book that bears his name,

* Inaugural Address, second ed., appendix, p. 95.

† Inaugural Address, p. 34.

which is contrary to direct statements of Holy Scripture and to the essential doctrines of the Standards of the said Church that the Holy Scripture evidences itself to be the Word of God by the consent of all the parts, and that the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself."

The charges which I shall next notice are those which deal with Professor Briggs's doctrine of authenticity. I do not see that in this trial we are called upon to prove that the Bible and the Confession of Faith are in the right in this respect. Whatever arguments may be employed to controvert the scriptural view of this subject, it will be admitted by large numbers of scholars that the conclusions reached by radical criticism are not so certain nor so unanimous as to warrant the Church in contradicting the doctrine of the Scripture with reference to the genuineness of some books of the Old Testament, and of adopting as certain, the hypotheses of authorship and redaction which the ingenuity of eminent scholars has devised. It is, of course, no essential part of our creed to have right views as to the authorship of the Book of Job, for example, provided that it is admitted that it is an inspired book. The evil of adopting all the conclusions which have been advanced by the critics of the Bible is two-fold. It involves doctrine which is anti-Christian, and it involves doctrine which is anti-Presbyterian.

Of course, the claim will be made at once that I am in no position to judge of the validity of the conclusions of modern criticism. It will be urged that this is the work of experts and specialists. We have been told by writers repeatedly during the past year that it is only the unlearned, the willfully ignorant, the men who are blinded by traditionalism, that create the opposition to these radical views as to authenticity. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, the opinion has been publicly expressed by a minister of our Church, that the majority of the Presbyterian clergy are incompetent to say whether the doctrines advanced by the radical critics are well-

founded or not. I am not ready to admit this statement in so far as the Presbyterian clergy are concerned, but in my own case I admit it freely.

I do not undertake to commit the folly of claiming any special learning regarding the literature of the Bible, but one might wish that many of those who find fault with the ignorance of their brethren on these subjects were themselves a little more learned in logic, in Presbyterian law, and in the plain and simple statements of Holy Scripture. Is it not clear that a man to whom an appeal to the authority of Scripture or to the Confessional doctrine is made in vain, is no longer a Presbyterian? and that if he objects to theological questions being settled on that ground, his objection is *ipso facto* heresy? A polemical argument presented by one party in the Church to another party in the Church assumes that the Bible and the Standards of the Church are the final authority. There is another kind of argument, which may be called apologetical, which is addressed to those who do not hold to the same Standards with ourselves. Is it not plain, that unless an appeal to the Standards of the Church is final, the opposing party is, by the very terms of the controversy, no longer Presbyterian? And so, if a clergyman comes to me and tells me that the Scriptural and the Confessional doctrine as to the genuineness of the Bible is wrong, without being a specialist in oriental studies, I am compelled to say to him that he is teaching what is heretical.

Now, from a legal point of view, the Presbyterian Church is an organization, the Standards of which are its Constitution.* Let us take a somewhat analogous case. Suppose that a society were to be formed to follow the teachings of Plato. Suppose that the society by an adopting act were to declare that they would be guided absolutely by the writings of Plato, and that as a condition of belonging to that society, a man must subscribe to the society's interpretation of Plato. The question, in the first instance, would be to determine what the writings of Plato were. Suppose that it should be

The Standards
Our Constitu-
tion.

* Minutes General Assembly, 1788, p. 546. Moore's Digest, p. 51.

adopted as a part of the Constitution of this society, that the ancient canon of the Platonic writings should be taken to be obligatory. One can conceive of a Platonic critic of the nineteenth century saying to the members of the society: "Do you not know that Plato did not write all the books which you attribute to him?" One critic might hold that the *Laws* were spurious, another might wish to throw out the *Parmenides*, but, whatever the force of their arguments, a man who should abandon the position of the society with regard to the Platonic canon would no longer have any reason for subscribing to its constitution. Well, but one may answer, the object of the Presbyterian Church is not to vindicate a certain view of Hebrew literature. Granted that it is generally believed that Moses did write the Pentateuch, and that David did write most of the Psalms, such positions are no part of the essence of the Presbyterian faith.

It is just here that the New Testament is the arbiter. It is just here that the Confession of Faith is obligatory. If we believe that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, for example, and radical criticism urges that we are wrong, we do not oppose their contention simply because we regard their position as due to a mere literary error, to a mistake in reasoning. We oppose it on the authority of Jesus Christ. We are called upon to pronounce our decision concerning a plausible hypothesis, on the one hand, and the Word of Christ on the other. You cannot, according to the Standards of the Presbyterian Church, choose from among the sayings of the Bible what you will or will not believe. For it is the only "infallible rule of faith." You cannot choose from among the sayings of our Lord what you will believe and what you will reject, for He is the Way and the Truth and the Life. It is not an article of our creed that the Son of God, in His humiliation upon earth, was omniscient. But it is an article of our faith that He was infallible. But it will be said that this is an *a priori* argument. Well, did not our Lord use an *a priori* argu-

ment in enforcing the claims of His own doctrine? He, indeed, put the premises and conclusion in a different order from the one which I have just followed. He did not say, If ye believe my words, ye shall believe the writings of Moses, but He did say, "If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"*

It will thus be seen that the doctrines of Professor Briggs with respect to Holy Scripture are irreconcilable with the teaching of Scripture and of the Confession of Faith.

Even admitting (which I do not admit for a moment), that the doctrine of the divine authority of the Reason is not *per se* heretical, and that Professor Briggs's real meaning is very different from that which his words convey; even admitting that his doctrine of Inspiration is not *per se* heretical, and that his meaning has been entirely mistaken, even admitting that his statements with respect to inerrancy and prophecy are not explicitly heretical; even admitting that judged by any one of these doctrines, it may not be necessary to regard his opinion and position as seriously heretical (none of which admissions I am prepared to make), I contend that all these divergences from the Confessional and Scriptural doctrine are so related that one is not entitled to look upon them as accidental, but as logically connected, and as forming a systematic error which strikes at the first principles of the Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Charge VI is as follows:

CHARGE VI.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America charges the Rev. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., being a Minister of the said Church and a member of the Presbytery of New York, with teaching that Sanctification is not complete at death, which is contrary to the essential doctrine of Holy Scripture and of the

* John v., 47.

Standards of the said Church, that the souls of believers are at their death at once made perfect in holiness.

The sixth charge relates to the state of the soul after death. I shall attempt to show that Professor Briggs's doctrine on this subject is contra-confessional because it affirms the theory of progressive sanctification after death.

Professor Briggs affirms that the word "redemption" includes the "whole process of grace." It comprehends regeneration, justification, repentance, faith, sanctification and glorification. Now, the real meaning of the doctrine of progressive sanctification cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration Professor Briggs's doctrine of redemption, of which sanctification is a part.*

To do this, we must first notice the statement made by Professor Briggs with respect to the relation of election to redemption. Now, we do not have to discuss the question of the divine decrees at this point. It is not here a question as to whether the Confession and the Scriptures teach Supra-lapsarianism, or the contrary. It is not here a question as to the nature or order of the divine decrees. It is rather on the common ground occupied by Calvinists and Arminians that objection to this view of redemption is brought. It is not whether election is founded on God's sovereign will, or is conditional on the character and will of Man. It is not so much a question as to the purpose of God as it is a question as to the salvation of Man. It is the distinct specific question of the relation of redemption to election, and therefore the relation of election to the salvation of the race.

Nor is the issue whether or not the atonement is limited, whether Christ died for all men or for the elect only. However firm our belief may be as to either the one or the other of these alternatives, a certain latitude of interpretation is permitted, and it is not necessary to regard either of these alternatives as

* Inaugural Address, pp. 52, 53. Inaugural Address, second edition, p. 100.

heretical. Professor Briggs declares that Presbyterians have too often limited redemption by their doctrine of election ; and that the Bible knows no such limitations.* But if election does not limit redemption, it follows that there may be redeemed men who are not elect. If redemption were used by Professor Briggs in a narrow sense, to describe the objective work effected through the incarnation and death of God the Son, it might be said : This is nothing more than the denial of the doctrine of a limited atonement, which may be false, but is not heretical. That is, it may be interpreted as meaning that redemption is for all men, whosoever believeth will be saved. In that sense it is true that the whole race is redeemed, but only the elect have their sins forgiven, their pardon pronounced. Only the elect are sanctified and glorified. In any case, it would be doubtful whether or not Professor Briggs meant to affirm or deny that all men are saved.

But, in order that there may be no doubt as to his meaning, he has defined redemption in such a way as to lay himself open to the charge of teaching the salvation of the whole race of men. He affirms that redemption includes "not only the forgiveness of sins," but deliverance from bodily evil. But he goes farther ; he says, "The Redemption of the Bible comprehends the whole process of grace The Bible rises above the faults of modern theology, and comprehends in its redemption of man, his justification, sanctification and glorification ; his regeneration, his renovation and his transformation ; his faith, repentance and holy love."† Then those who are not elect may undergo these gracious changes, and have these gracious benefits. Unless such is the case, redemption is limited by election, which Professor Briggs denies. Even if we say with Arminians that God elects men on account of their faith, or on account of their works, or on account of their faith and their works, we cannot affirm that any of the non-elect are redeemed. And if we should

* Inaugural Address, p. 55.

† Inaugural Address, pp. 52, 53.

say that redemption means only the possibility of salvation held out to the whole race of men, if we accept Professor Briggs's doctrine, we are obliged to affirm that this possibility becomes a certainty, for the whole race of man is redeemed, and redemption includes regeneration, justification, sanctification and glorification. From his doctrine of redemption, and from his doctrine of election, he draws the conclusion: "The Bible does not teach universal salvation, but it does teach the salvation of the world, of the race of man." We cannot object to this statement, if it means that a very great multitude is saved, for it is plainly taught in the Bible that the host of the redeemed will be very great. But when we are told that the salvation of the world cannot be accomplished by the selection of a limited number of individuals from the mass, then we affirm that it means nothing, or else it means that salvation is the selection of an unlimited number from the mass. What does that mean, viewed in the light of the statement that redemption is not limited by election?

It will be said: "You cannot charge Professor Briggs with holding the doctrine of universalism, for he distinctly says that the Bible does not teach universal salvation." But, as I understand it, the heresy of universalism does not consist essentially in the statement that all men are saved. Universalism is essentially heretical because of its statement of the way in which men are saved. It is the premises upon which universalism is founded, not the conclusion itself, that is essentially heretical. Professor Briggs's doctrine is capable of but two interpretations, either of which is heresy. Either he teaches that the non-elect are redeemed, which would be heretical; or he teaches that all men are elect, which is also heretical.

Now, there is a logical connection between the doctrine of redemption and that of sanctification after death.

If sanctification is regarded as a part of redemption, and if it be held that a part of the work of redemption

* Inaugural Address, p. 55.

goes on after death, there is no difficulty in identifying the process after death with a process of redemption. We are not told by Professor Briggs whether the other processes of redemption are or are not carried on in a future state. But it is reasonable to infer that a man who believes that we are justified by faith, and who believes that a man must be justified before he can be said to be glorified, must show in some way that those who are redeemed, but who have never believed in this world, have believed to their justification. Can a man who has not believed in this life, be justified in this life? If he can, then the Bible and the Confession of Faith are wrong in teaching the doctrine of justification by faith. If he cannot, then none of those who have failed to believe, in this life, can be justified, unless they are justified in another world. It is logical to suppose that when Professor Briggs speaks of redemption after death, he means that all the processes of grace included in the term redemption may take place in the other world.

But you will say, Has not Professor Briggs said distinctly in the answers to the questions put to him by his sympathetic colleagues, that he does not believe in a second probation after death?* Let this be granted. But does he believe that the present is a state of probation? It may be that the state of first probation is past and that all probation is over. Professor Briggs has taught elsewhere† that the race had but one probation, and that was the probation of Adam as the head of the race. Of course, then, he does not believe in a second probation. Nor was it necessary for him to deny a belief in the doctrine of Purgatory. No one ever supposed that he did believe in Purgatory. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory has but little in common with the theory of Professor Briggs, although, if we were choosing between the two doctrines, we might prefer the Roman Catholic doctrine to that taught by

* *Vide* Questions submitted to Prof. Briggs by Directors of Union Seminary.

† Whither, p. 217.

Professor Briggs. Let us, then, dismiss from this discussion for the present, the idea that Professor Briggs has uttered universalistic doctrine, or that he has uttered the doctrine of purgatory. He is not a universalist because he affirms that some men will be lost. It might be shown that his principles lead logically to universalism, but as he has stated explicitly that the hopelessly irredeemable, sink to the lowest depths in the Middle State, he must have the benefit of the doubt. However obscure Professor Briggs's statements may seem when he treats of the subject of redemption, it is perfectly clear that he believes, or expresses his belief, in sanctification as a process being continued after death. He denies immediate sanctification after death, and repudiates the idea that there is magical transformation in the dying hour. On this point the standards of the Church teach a directly contradictory doctrine, the Shorter Catechism being especially strong,* using first the expression "at" their death, and second, the word "immediately." As to a progressive transformation in glory, and possibly in happiness, and a growth of believers after death, there is no dispute, but the Confession is decisive in its statement with regard to the completion of sanctification not after but at the hour of death. As to Professor Briggs's "bugbear of a particular judgment after death," this is said by him, to be a terror to the best of men. But it would appear from Holy Scripture and from the work which Christ has accomplished for us, that fear of a particular judgment immediately after death should have no terrors for him who is clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

The question to be decided by this court is a very simple one. Professor Briggs's doctrines have been presented in evidence, they have been judged by comparing them with the Holy Scriptures and with the standards of Presbyterian doctrine. Knowing what the Presbyterian Church teaches and what Professor Briggs teaches, you have simply to decide whether the doc-

*Q. 37.

trine of the Professor agrees with that of the Church, or whether it does not. If you should decide that the case against him is proven, and I confess that I do not see how you can avoid the conclusion, the next question will be as to the essential and vital character of these departures from the standards of our faith.

I think you will all agree with me in one thing, whether you are supporters of Professor Briggs or not, and that is, that in these days, when we are assailed by a high ecclesiastical theory on the one hand, and by a rationalistic and agnostic philosophy on the other, it is of especial importance that Presbyterians should be very tenacious and decided with respect to the authority to which appeal is made in matters of religion. Let it be observed, however, that I am not claiming that the doctrine of Professor Briggs should be condemned because it seems to be radically subversive of the Presbyterian principle of authority. That has been already presented to you. But what I am now claiming is, that assuming that his position with respect to the divine authority of the Church and the Reason is heretical, the heresy is vital. It is vital not merely because it sets up the Reason as a divine authority, which may dispute the claims of the Holy Scripture, but it is vital also because it weakens the authority of the Scriptures in matters of faith by affirming their errancy, by denying their authenticity, and by reducing the doctrine of inspiration to such a minimum that it is of no real value to us in matters of faith and practice. In like manner I think that you will agree with me that Prof. Briggs's theory of redemption, is vital to the whole scheme of Presbyterian belief. It is opposed not simply to the doctrine of decrees taught in the Confession of Faith. That claim might be made, but there are some who would not regard such a departure from the Standards as heretical. But this theory of redemption is essentially out of harmony with the cardinal doctrines of evangelical religion, not to say of Protestant religion. It strikes at the roots of that great Protestant principle, "Justification by faith," and differs from universalism,

only because the author has not pursued his doctrine to its logical conclusion. And the doctrine of progressive sanctification after death, however it may be interpreted, strikes at the foundation of certain great principles upon which all preaching rests, and which underlie the missionary efforts of Christendom. But I am prepared to go farther than this and to notice the principle of which these doctrines are an evidence and a symptom. Those who have read history carefully, will bear me out in the assertion, that it is impossible for a man to present a radical doctrine with respect to the fundamental principles of religion, without that doctrine carrying with it a principle—sometimes a principle of scientific method, sometimes a principle of philosophical method. I do not claim that any rational philosophy of religion is consciously defended when Professor Briggs presents doctrines such as form the basis of the charges. On the contrary, it is just because he seems so unconscious of what his principles involve, that I am anxious to call not only your attention, but his attention, to the erroneous principles assumed and implied in the teaching, on which the Presbytery is to be called upon to pass. It is not that Professor Briggs having accepted a system or method of philosophy is carrying it to its logical conclusions. He has doubtless reached his conclusions by an induction of facts collected in his study and from the works of critical writers. But, as I have just said, when fundamental doctrines are advanced or contradicted, the advance or the contradiction involves a principle of philosophy.

Now, what philosophy is implied, what philosophy is wrapped up in the theological doctrine which Professor Briggs has tried to read into Holy Scripture and the Standards of the Presbyterian Church?

Naturalism.

I answer, and I shall prove my answer, that his doctrine is an expression, whether he is conscious of it or not, is an expression of the naturalistic philosophy. It is still a disputed question, how far the naturalistic method may be employed in the philosophical sciences. But as a religious method,

its conclusions are radically opposed to supernatural religion. Examples of it are to be found in the thought of modern England, in the explanation of religion from ghost or ancestor worship. Examples of it in Germany are to be found in the naturalistic interpretation of the Hebrew religion by the school of Kuenen. To discuss its tendency specifically, would be to open up the wide field of Apologetics. But in brief, it may be described as an attempt to explain, on natural principles, Christianity of the historic type, or as Professor Briggs would doubtless call it, of the traditional type.

Now it is quite possible for a man to follow this naturalistic method partially, without following it thoroughly. I do not say that if a man follows it partially, he is bound to follow it thoroughly, although some men are remorseless in their logic, and stop at no consequences. Certainly Professor Briggs does not follow it thoroughly, for he does not deny many of the miracles of the Bible, and he writes with great eloquence of the Theophanies and the Christophanies. The characteristic of this kind of thought is, however, to emphasize the interference of God in all human history in such a manner as to take away from it, that exclusive character which Christianity claims for itself.

Let me call attention to some manifestations of this naturalism in the writings of Professor Briggs, in illustration of my meaning. Foremost among the doctrines taught by him, which are symptoms of naturalism, is the doctrine of the divine authority of the Reason, which is placed so high as to make it a matter of indifference, so far as men are concerned, whether they are faithful to the Word of God or not. He teaches that it is a matter of temperament and environment which way of access to God men may pursue. Then follows the discrediting of the Bible as a divine authority, by pointing out its errors, as well as by advancing a theory of inspiration which permits us to speak of the divine truth of the Bible, only, as we speak of the divine poetry of Milton. Then there is his view of divine prophecy which discredits the predictions of the holy prophets, on

the principles of naturalistic thought. It goes farther in Professor Briggs's work on Messianic Prophecy* (referred to in the Inaugural Address), where he predicates prophecy, or rather prophetic inspiration, of heathen writers. Naturalism appears once more in the doctrine of Miracles, where it is admitted that any naturalistic interpretation of them would not affect their meaning and value. In the treatment of redemption there is naturalism where the plan of redemption is set forth in accordance, not with the explicit statements of the Bible, but in accordance with a naturalistic view of the unfortunate condition of the heathen, and an unscriptural and fanciful doctrine of the future state. These doctrines, I say, are manifestations of that naturalistic principle which, in the hands of a more logical writer than Professor Briggs, would be pushed to far more radical conclusions.

As soon as we begin to give up the supernatural explanation of religion, we are likely to be led to give up all religion, at least all religion which can speak with authority in correction of wandering human theories, and false sentimental views of God, and of Sin and of Salvation. If, then, you decide that such divergences as these are permissible, you have given liberty to a method which will soon leave you about as much exclusiveness as Christians, in having the oracles of God, as Mahometans or Brahmins have.

It is, of course, easy for a man to say: Suppose, however, I am convinced of the truth of these doctrines, will the Church muzzle me, silence me, for uttering what I am persuaded is true? This brings us back to the question of heresy. Look at the principle which such a question involves. I can imagine a man after an exhaustive study of patristic and scholastic literature, becoming so convinced that the Roman Church is the true church, that he might preach Romanism from a Presbyterian pulpit. It is not likely, but I make the supposition. The Presbytery would, doubtless, interfere. And then suppose that he should say: "You

* Messianic Prophecy, p. 33.

are silencing me for teaching what I believe to be true. You are not experts on this question. I have devoted my life to the study of Roman Catholic literature, and I am leading you on in the paths of divine Providence." Possibly you would reply: "You are a remarkable scholar; we admit that no one of us has given as much attention to the literature of the fathers and the schoolmen as you have. But our church, whether mistaken or not, has required of you, at your ordination, to take a vow to sustain its standards of doctrine. We are not silencing you because you know more about this literature of the past than we do, but because we believe differently from you. And our belief is not something which can be changed, even at the demand of a great scholar." I have made the supposition, but there is no one who would remain in the Presbyterian Church long enough to listen to such a reply. He would take his patristic and scholastic literature with him, and go to his spiritual director, who would doubtless tell him that if he had not left the church of his own accord, the Presbyterian Church would have been quite justified in inviting him to leave. A heresy trial is not persecution, for when the charges are proved it is simply proved that the accused has been converted to another form of religion. We are sorry that he is so mistaken, we wish that he had not left the faith in which he once believed, but we have to choose between our own doctrines and his.

The question meets each one of us, are these doctrines of Professor Briggs contradictory to the Holy Scriptures and to the Standards of our Church? In approving of his teaching, and you do approve of it, if you vote for an acquittal, you who have this view will go back to your respective congregations with the acknowledgment that your view of the Word of God is not the view of the prophets and apostles, and of Jesus Christ himself. You are virtually to say to them and to the world, that the Bible is not any longer regarded by you as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, but that the Reason and the Church are also fountains of divine

authority ; that the words of the Bible do not convey the inspired truth ; that it is a matter of temperament and environment which way of access to God men may pursue ; that the whole race of man is redeemed, will be justified, sanctified, glorified, whether they be elected or not, whether they be heathen or Christian. You will tell them that a man who teaches all these doctrines should still remain in that ministry that has been honored by such men as Edwards, and Smith, and the Hodges, and Adams. And you will collect money for missions, although you agree that most men will be saved in the Middle State, even if they die in their sins.

You will agree with me that the issue is of vital importance. Men do not pick out a victim, and then search for errors in his doctrines, so as to have the peculiar pleasure of trying him for heresy. But trials for heresy are forced upon the church, when clergymen, in violation of their vows of ordination, and setting at defiance the Standards of doctrine in their own communion, persist in teaching these errors, and decline to retract them specifically, even though they claim that they are misunderstood.

Every one will admit that the necessity for trials of this kind is greatly to be deplored. They are a cause of vexation and disturbance to the Church, and temporarily divert the minds of men from that great object of our energies and efforts, the transformation of the world to the likeness of Christ. But the responsibility for this painful process rests not upon those who are loyal to Presbyterian doctrine, but upon those who are its assailants. And unless we maintain the purity of our faith, we shall soon have no pure faith to proclaim to the world. It is possible that even those who disapprove of Professor Briggs's doctrines may hold that the Church should tolerate differences of opinion within reasonable limits, and that we may tolerate what we do not approve. I freely admit that intolerance is a bad thing. I should be the last to deny that liberty is a great treasure. But by intolerance I do not understand hold-

ing men to their obligations, and by liberty I understand conformity to law.

There should be no attempt to obscure the issue which is now before this Judicatory. It is not a conflict between the Old School and the New School. That distinction is no longer recognized in our Church. But the great leaders of what was formerly the New School party were among the staunchest defenders of the authority of the Bible, and it would be a slight upon the memory of men like Edward Robinson, Henry B. Smith and William Adams, to attribute to them opinions which they would have repudiated. Nor is this an issue between the Revision and Anti-Revision party. None of the points raised in this trial has been raised in connection with the revision of our standards, unless, indeed, the proposed words* relating to the truthfulness of Scripture may be construed as designed to strengthen and support the prosecution in cases like this. Nor is this a question between scholarship and ignorance, unless the Presbyterian standards and the Holy Bible are to be regarded as ignorant teachers. We do not ask that men should be restricted as to their methods of research, and we are ready to deal with any new hypothesis. But what we do demand is, that when men advance conclusions which contradict the doctrines which they have solemnly promised to support, they should be challenged and required either to abide by our doctrines or else submit to the decisions of our courts.

The Real
Issue.

* Report of Committee on Revision to the Assembly of 1891.





